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AUTHOR Ediger, Marlow
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ABSTRACT

The four essays in this collection provide guidelines for parents and teachers in educating children. The first essay, "Parents, the Pupil, and the School Curriculum," describes selected ways parents may help pupils to achieve in the school curriculum. "Objectives of the School, the Pupil, and Parents" discusses the need for teachers to plan educational objectives that include problem-solving skills, creative thinking, critical thinking, and the ability to get along well with others as well as to understand the subject matter. "Parent-Teacher Conferences and the Child" focuses on what questions parents might wish to ask about their child in a parent-teacher conference. The final essay, "Report Cards, the Student, and Parents," discusses the different possible interpretations of grades, the advantages and disadvantages to schools of issuing report cards, and the benefits of using parent-teacher conferences instead of report cards. (CB)

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TEACHERS, PARENTS, AND THE SCHOOL
(A Collection of Essays)

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By

Dr. Marlow Ediger

Professor of Education

Northeast Missouri State University

Kirksville, Missouri 63501

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PARENTS, THE PUPIL, AND THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Responsible parents are concerned about their child's progress in school. These parents, no doubt, wonder how they may become more actively involved in the achievement of their children in the school-class setting. Which are selected ways in which parents may help pupils to achieve well in the school curriculum?

Guiding Pupil Achievement

The following ways, among others, are important for parents to aid their children to achieve optimally in the school-class setting:

1. Be certain that physiological needs to pupils are being met. Thus, proper food, clothing, shelter, and rest must be provided in the home setting in order that pupils can do their best in diverse curriculum areas in the school setting. Hardly can pupils achieve to their optimum in school if any of the previously mentioned physiological needs have not been met adequately.

2. Help pupils feel secure and loved in the home setting. This will aid pupils in developing feelings of belonging in the home. These feelings should have much transfer value when thinking of what a child needs in the home as well as in the school-class setting.

3. Show interest in the child's school work. Pupils, in many situations wish to share their progress and work in school with parents. Be a good listener in these situations! Do not ridicule or minimize a child's work in school. Rather, give praise for improved work in school.

4. Consult at regular intervals with the teacher (or teachers) as to progress made in school by your child. If the pupil is experiencing difficulty, find out what you (the parent) can do to help. The home and the school must work together to develop the best curriculum for each pupil.

5. Provide an appropriate place for the child to complete homework activities.

This area should be relatively quiet, comfortable, and conducive to completing homework projects.

6. Take children on excursions to museums, a farm, and other places of educational interest. These experiences may well provide background information for pupils directly or indirectly related to school work.

7. Set a model for pupils in the area of reading by taking time to engage in this enjoyable and profitable experience. Help pupils check out relevant reading materials from the public library. Have ample reading materials in the home setting. Children may be read to, as well as read content from these books on their own when readiness is in evidence.

8. Speak positively about the efforts of the teacher (or teachers) involved in teaching your (the parents) children. Deficiencies in providing for individual differences in the school-class setting should be discussed with the involved teachers and the principal.

In Closing

The home and the school need to work together to provide the best curriculum possible for each pupil. There is much, of course, that the home can do to aid each pupil to achieve optimal development in the school-class setting. Needs of pupils need to be identified and fulfilled. These include psychological, physiological, and knowledge needs.

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SELECTED REFERENCES

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OBJECTIVES OF THE SCHOOL, THE PUPIL, AND PARENTS

Objectives, whether they are written down by the teacher or not, represent the direction pupils may behave as a result of instruction. Thus, objectives state what kinds of behavior learners may ultimately exhibit after interacting with selected learning activities.

Teachers need to select objectives carefully which pupils are to achieve. Too frequently, textbooks determine what students are to learn. The teacher very often assigns selected pages for pupils to read followed by discussion of major ideas presented in these textbooks. The questions asked of students may require little more than giving isolated facts as responses.

Isolated facts that pupils learn in many situations may soon be forgotten. It is important that pupils ask questions and identify problem areas. Learners can then gather information from a variety of learning activities, such as the use of audio-visual materials, reading materials, and other reference sources in getting answers to these questions or problems. While gathering information to solve questions or problems, pupils need to think critically by separating facts from opinions, and accurate statements from inaccurate statements. New or relevant solutions need to be sought to important questions and problems; thus creative thinking is involved in ongoing learning activities.

Which Objectives Are Relevant For Pupils to Achieve?

It is difficult to determine precisely what kind of behavior is desired within pupils. Previously, it was stated that problem solving, critical thinking and creative thinking are important goals in teaching-learning situations. Each human being has problems to solve such as how to earn an adequate income, how to get along well with others, and how to use one's abilities in life, among others. To solve these and other problems, one must obtain as much information as possible. The information will need to be sorted in terms of desirable versus undesirable solutions. Thus, critical thinking is involved. Finally, a creative solution needs to be developed in attempting to solve the indentified problem. Too frequently, solutions which have worked for others in similar situations do not work for a specific, unique problem. It is no wonder then that problem solving, critical thinking, and creative thinking should be relevant objectives in the school curriculum.

It certainly is important for individuals to get along well with others in society. Too frequently, teachers stress control over pupils, a rigid classroom environment, and subject matter learnings so that little or no time is available to help pupils develop well socially. Proper social development of all pupils is an important objective to stress in the school setting.

Values clarification has become an important objective in many schools in the United States. There certainly are many diverse values that individuals live by. It is very important to develop a positive workable value system for each individual. Values guide individuals in the making of choices or decisions in every day living. By observing human beings, one can infer to some extent the value system that is in operation pertaining to decisions that are made. Teachers cannot dictate values to students. Students in many cases have rebelled against this approach or have not accepted these dictated values as being important or relevant. Rather,

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students are encouraged to view, express, and critically examine diverse values and develop conclusions which they can accept and give positive direction in life.

As was stated previously, many teachers are concerned largely with subject matter learnings that students obtain in the different curriculum areas within the school setting. It is important for learners to achieve relevant facts, main ideas, concepts, and generalizations. Selected educators have felt it is an exceedingly difficult task to determine what content in the different curriculum areas is important to learn. Some have even gone as far as to say that one body of content is as important as another body of content in a specific curriculum area. These educators could stress problem solving, critical thinking, creative thinking, and good human relations pertaining to content that would interest learners within a given subject matter area. Pupils here, of course, would be gaining facts, concepts, main ideas, and generalizations; however, being able to use skills in thinking and getting along well with others would be more important in terms of objectives for pupils to achieve. There are, of course, educators who feel that subject matter learnings which students are to gain can be identified in terms of relevant content. These learnings then may become more important objectives for pupils to achieve as compared to pupils developing well socially and becoming proficient thinkers.

In Summary

It is important for pupils to achieve objectives pertaining to problem solving skills, creative thinking, and critical thinking. It is also important for individuals to get along well with others as well as possess a positive set of values. Relevant subject matter learnings should be identified in different curriculum areas by teachers and supervisors; pupils should be guided in acquiring these learnings.

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PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES AND THE CHILD

Parents of children need to have an adequate number of conferences with the teacher during any given school year. These conderences can be held any time during the school year when the time is suitable to both parents and the teacher. Parents may come to the school-class setting for these conferences. Conferences can also be held in the home setting or another suitable place. The use of the telephone is an efficient means, in many situations, to confer about a child's progress. Mutual respect is important toward participants in these conferences by involved individuals. The home and the school must work together to develop the best curriculum possible for each child!

The Agenda and Parent-Teacher Conferences

An agenda merely pertains to items that may be discussed in a parent-teacher conference. The teacher or teachers usually will have special items to discuss in the conference setting. The parent or parents should also make significant contributions in these conferences. What might parents wish to discuss in a conference with the teacher?

1. How well the child is achieving in each curriculum area, such as reading and the language arts, social studies, science, and mathematics. The parent should ask to examine completed work of the pupil. Questions may be raised by the parent in terms of why a child is making specific kinds of errors, for example, in mathematics and in spelling. Parents should definitely ask what they can do to help their children achieve at an optimal level.

2. How well the child is developing emotionally. If a child, for example, does not like the social studies curriculum, as being presently emphasized, this should be discussed with the teacher. Parents and the teacher then need to diagnose what a child specifically does not like about ongoing units of study in the social studies.

   A. Is an excessive amount of reading required to gain ideas in the social studies, and yet the involved learner does not like to read?
   B. Are the learning activities boring for a pupil? Learners should experience a variety of activities including the use of audio-visual materials as well as listening, speaking, dramatizing, contructing, participating in art work, and reading activities.

C. Are pupils expected to be unrealistically quiet during the time social studies is taught?
D. Is it difficult for learners to get along well with classmates?
E. Are workbooks and duplicated worksheets utilized excessively in ongoing social studies units?

The teacher and parents must attempt to pinpoint what a pupil does not like in a specific curriculum area and work in the direction of helping each learner to achieve optimal development.

There is much that parents can do to help their children like a curriculum area, such as social studies.

A. Parents can discuss television and radio newscasts with children when the latter are ready for these learnings.
B. Fascinating, interesting library books dealing with diverse foreign countries and people should be available for reading by the child in the home setting. These may be purchased and/or checked out free from a school library as well as a public library.
C. Parents need to show interest in content being studied by their children in the school-class setting.

3. Parents may also discuss with the teacher how well a child is developing socially.

   A. Does the child interact well with others in the school lunchroom, in committee work, in the class setting, in large group instruction, as well as on the playground?
   B. Is there evidence that the child feels good about himself or herself in terms of that which is experienced in the total school environment?

4. It is important to gain information on how well the child is developing physically. Each pupil in order to feel well and achieve optimally needs to have adequate nutritious food, ample sleep, proper clothing, and experience a confortable learning environment in the home and school-class setting. The teacher must accept each pupil as a human being having much worth and guide learners individually to achieve as well as possible in all curriculum areas within the framework of the school's environment. The learner needs to experience learning activities where a quiet environment is needed, such as in the area of reading. Pupils should also experience activities where movement and motion are involved, such as in construction activities, dramatizations, and the playing of games.

In Closing

The home and the school must work together to provide the best curriculum possible for each pupil. Input from parent-teacher conferences can do much to help a learner achieve optimally in each curriculum area in the school-class setting.

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REPORT CARDS, THE STUDENT, AND PARENTS

When report cards are issued at selected intervals, anxiety in the student and parents may be an end result. The student, of course, generally does not like to reveal "D" and "F" grades to parents. Perhaps, the student even feels reserved about showing "C" grades in the home setting. Students and parents, of course, are happy to notice high grades on a report card. This is only natural.

Diverse Interpretations of Grades

Any grade on a report card can be interpreted in many ways:

1. Do the top achievers get "A" grades, followed by the next best achievers getting "B" grades, and so on down the line with a certain number of students obtaining "F" grades?

2. Are students graded on the basis of effort regardless of how well they compete with others? Thus, a slow learner could obtain "A" grades due to effort.

3. If a student, for example, gets an "A" grade in social studies, what does this mean? Is the student being graded on (a) test results, (b) contributions made in class, (c) critical and creative thinking as well as problem solving skills, (d) being a cooperative individual, and/or (e) being a likeable person?

4. The checklist approach in reporting pupil progress is equally subjective. Here the teacher checks student achievement in such areas as completing work on time, being considerate of others, working well independently, and working up to capacity in learning. For example, how does a teacher know if a child is achieving up to his potential?

There certainly are advantages and disadvantages in a school system issuing report cards at selected intervals. Advantages include the following:

1. It represents one approach in reporting pupil progress to parents.

2. Parents can get some general ideas as to how well their children are achieving in school.

3. A conference may be scheduled with teachers pertaining to grades students received on the report card and then work with instructors toward an improved curriculum.

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There are school systems that have done away with the issuing of report cards as a means of reporting pupil progress to parents. (Other school systems realize their limitations.) There are many reasons for this decision.

1. The giving of grades on report cards does not communicate to parents how well pupils are achieving in school.

2. Individual grades on report cards can be interpreted by parents in many different ways as to their meaning.

3. Parents and students may develop negative attitudes toward the school setting if low grades are in evidence on report cards.

4. Parents may withhold selected privileges from students if the latter does not "measure up" in terms of grades received. (Perhaps, the student cannot achieve at a higher rate due to capacity or ability to learn.)

5. Grades are arbitrarily given. For example, if grades are given based on test results, the teacher can write relatively easy test items with students getting a high percent of responses correct. The teacher could also write very complex tests and the percent of items gotten correct by students would be low in general. There are many relevant learnings that pupils get which cannot be measured in testing situations such as positive attitudes toward learning.

Important Factors to Consider in Reporting Pupil Progress

When evaluating pupil achievement, the most important factor, no doubt, is that students enjoy learning. If pupils like to learn in all curriculum areas, then they should be achieving to their optimum potential in social studies, science, mathematics, language arts, and other curriculum areas in the school setting.

When pupils enjoy relevant learning activities in the different curriculum areas, successful achievers will be in evidence. All individuals basically desire to be successful. Students in the school setting should feel successful. If selected students obtain low grades on report cards, teacher proficiency in teaching is actually being evaluated. Do these teachers have difficulty in providing for individual differences so that all students may learn as much as possible in different curriculum areas within the school setting? It certainly

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wastes the teacher's time as well as the students if the latter is not interested and does not see purpose in learning.

Thus, it is difficult to report pupil progress to parents through the issuing of report cards. This represents a one-way street of communication - from the teacher and school to parents. A two-way street of communication is better such as using parent-teacher conferences to evaluate student achievement. In a positive, relaxed environment, the teacher and parents may assess pupil achievement in the following areas:

1. being interested and perceiving purpose in learning.
2. feeling successful in learning.
3. having an inward desire to learn.